



# Street Newz

April 1st, 2004

Thanks to CEDCO Victoria, the Open Door, and all the wonderful people who are helping this street newspaper evolve.

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## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

*By Janine Bandcroft*

While recently updating my retired parents about the progress of this street newspaper, and telling them stories about some of the interesting street folk I've met, my mother suddenly stated "you know, we were almost homeless at one time."

I didn't know. I was born in Edmonton, and the earliest house I remember was modestly sized, in a working class neighbourhood. Both mom and dad worked outside the home - dad drove city bus and mom was at the Bay - and when I was in grade one they managed to buy me a piano when a teacher recommended it. We didn't have a lot, but we certainly had enough - I never felt deprived.

I knew my mother had grown up in a small row-house in Northern England, sharing a room with her four brothers. She and my step-father fondly tease each other about which of their families struggled the most through war-time England - they both have many amazing tales

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of creative survival tactics. I didn't know the near homeless story.

"I remember living in one room in a London flat, pushing your brother in a pram through the city streets looking for houses with no curtains in the windows, hoping to find better accommodations," mom explained. The Council, London's war-time equivalent of social services, suggested mom and dad move home to their respective families. "Luckily," mom remembers, "we were soon moved into subsidized housing."

My step-father remembers being number fourteen thousand and something on the list to get on the waiting list for rental, or Council, housing.

And this was after they had both fought four years in a war designed to end tyranny and fascism.

Eventually, social health and welfare programs were implemented in England, and the hardships of life eased somewhat.

It took me many years, and some personal suffering, to understand the complex social and economic circumstances that lead to and promote poverty in our society.

I grew up with parents who promote values of hard work, regardless of the task, as the key to success.

The truth is, we live within a capitalist economic structure that thrives on a certain percentage of unemployment. In such a system there will always be poverty, there will always be homelessness - they're inherent characteristics of the dominant economic system as it's currently structured. Sadly, as long as such a system exists, there will always be poverty and homelessness, and the associated crimes.

Understanding the problem, I now seek to ease the suffering - for myself and others - and to understand the victims of the system. It is my hope that this newspaper will provide a glimpse into the lives of some of our neighbours who live in poverty and homelessness, to promote compassionate understanding, and to encourage a genuine concern for progressive change.



## THE LIMITS OF WELFARE LIMITS

*By Marge Reitsma-Street, PhD*

In 2002, the B.C. government significantly increased the number and type of limits to welfare assistance in the Employment and Assistance Act, and its companion law for those living with disabilities.

From the perspective of people who - for a time - have minimal or no income, the limits on welfare become hurdles they must scramble over, or a series of locked gates:

- \* Use up virtually all savings.
- \* Wait three weeks after applying.
- \* If young, prove two years of employment after leaving a parental home.
- \* If a student, do not apply, get a student loan.
- \* If the youngest child is over 3 years, look for paid work.
- \* If ill or disabled or unable to find a paid job, prove it repeatedly - with documented evidence.

And there's a new limit on paid work: every dollar earned while on welfare is taxed 100%, unless a person is disabled - then they're qualified to keep up to \$400 of their earnings each month.

### A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT?

B.C. is the first Canadian province to limit those who are "able to work" to no more than 24 months of welfare.

On February 27 2004, just weeks before hundreds of recipients expected to be cut off totally, or have their cheques reduced significantly, the government added a new exemption. Although neither the law nor regulation have changed, the policy and practice have. Now, if people follow a "legally binding employment plan" they remain eligible for \$510 per month if single, more if parenting children.

It remains unclear how many are denied benefits because they cannot prove their eligibility, or how people are supported to make an employment plan that makes sense to their situation - including caring for health and dependents, and the availability of adequate jobs.

### THE GOVERNMENT'S PERSPECTIVE

From the government's perspective limits on welfare are not hurdles, they're essential tools promoting independence and well-being - instruments to ensure sound use of resources for particular priorities.

The new laws ostensibly help push people more quickly into job independence and "save" them from welfare dependency. There are short-term training and job placement programs to help people jump the hurdles. And there are additional exemptions and special programs for persons with persistent and multiple barriers, and mental disorders.

# THE LIMITS OF WELFARE LIMITS (con't)

Pg 3.

The limits on welfare are a way for a government to argue it is being accountable for the money it holds in trust from taxpayers. Reduction in welfare caseloads to only those "truly in need" allegedly frees up money for other priorities.

But, do these reductions mean savings? What are the true costs of the new welfare limits? Are there limits to how these limits can work effectively?

## DISABILITY REASSESSMENT

In his February 2004 audit of the Ministry of Human Resources' disability reassessment, Auditor General George MacMinn concluded the government was within its mandate to conduct an eligibility review.

Five million dollars was spent on the Disability Reassessment Review, and only 400, or .6%, of cases reviewed were found ineligible. Of these only 46 had their cases closed.

One-third of the Ministry of Human Resources' budget is spent on 44% of the welfare caseload - persons living with multiple barriers or continuous disability.

A more focused sampling a random number of cases could have saved much of the \$5 million, and prevented the high stress and human cost to those undergoing the review.

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE RECIPIENTS GONE?

One major question to pursue is - who is denied welfare, and how?

The number of beneficiaries was nearly 250,000 in 2001. Three years later, the numbers are 165,000.

What happens to these people and their families?

The other question is - what goes into these legally binding employment plans and what must society, professionals, employers, community groups, and the Ministry of Human Resources do to ensure people can carry out these plans?

## HIDDEN COSTS OF WELFARE LIMITS

The true costs of limits, including a range of financial, human and community costs, needs careful attention. There is evidence that reductions in Ontario welfare rates, and the new 3-5 year limits on family welfare in the US, do not help people with low incomes. A minority do get employment, but their insecurity and poverty are not decreased. Also evictions, homelessness, hunger, and isolation for many increase - especially when there are serious restrictions to adequate child-care, jobs, housing, and education.

Some argue young parents are more at risk of losing their children to foster homes as they cannot find decent housing or pay for food and school costs. Others speak of the myriad of small reductions, such as no coverage for eye exams or regular dental work, that affect health and chances of getting an adequate job.

There are no savings to taxpayers either. A B.C. government funded study indicates it costs on average \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year for medical, shelter, and criminal justice costs associated with one person living on the streets, compared to \$25,000 for supportive housing.

A key cost is the disruption to citizenship. Citizens are put into double binds that restrict their capacity to act in their own best interests, and the interests of others. People feel forced to divide themselves as different from one another with some more eligible, others only temporarily so, and others not at all.

Limiting welfare without adequate consultation or consideration of what is required to live today means we seriously limit the trust and solidarity citizens need to respect themselves in times of vulnerability, and to care for others regardless of the family into which they are born or the circumstances they encounter.



Photo: Elaine Briere

# VICTORIA LITERARY TIMES

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Elizabeth Woods, Editor

The Victoria Literary Times, a new incarnation of an old idea-serializing novels (a la Dickens)-this time, in a tabloid newspaper format, is looking for submissions of novels, short fiction and poetry.

Starting April 1st, the Victoria Literary Times will be published bi-weekly. Each 16-page issue will contain an installment of the current novel, some short fiction and poetry-including a students' page-a crossword puzzle, and letters from our readers, and will sell for \$2.

A book will take four or five installments to complete, for a total of six books a year. The paper will be available in bookstores, some coffeehouses, on the street, and by subscription.

## Submission Guidelines

We want 'good reads'-stories which arise from the interaction of complex characters in complex relationships, and which have enough momentum to carry the reader forward from installment to installment.

Do not send entire manuscript of a novel; query by mail or e-mail; attachments only.

Novels: no more than 15 pages; stories, maximum 1,500 words; up to 5 poems, maximum 100 lines per poem. Include brief bio and publication history.

We buy first North American serial rights; copyright remains with the author.

Novels-royalties, by agreement with author. Short fiction and poetry-\$10-25 per story or poem; payment on publication.

Simultaneous submissions okay for novels (please tell us), but not for short fiction or poetry.

Include SASE for reply. Manuscripts will be returned only if they are accompanied by sufficient postage in Canadian stamps or International Reply Coupons; otherwise, they will be recycled.

Our purpose is two-fold: To provide readers with novels by new and emerging authors in inexpensive, lightweight editions designed to fit in with people's busy lives, and to provide new and emerging writers with an opportunity to reach and build an audience.

E-mail: vic\_lit@shaw.ca.

Mail: Editor, Victoria Literary Times, 71 Vickery Road, Victoria, B.C. V9B 1M3

## REGISTERING THE HOMELESS VOTE

### The provincial vote:

the person without a place they call home can give a location of a place they tend to sleep as an address. this can be a shelter they frequent, or even just a corner on an intersection.

note, if an intersection is given as an address, it should also indicate which corner of that intersection (eg, NW corner of Broad & Douglas), in case that intersection falls on the boundary of an electoral district.

the reason the provincial government

doesn't require proof of address is because the signature provided on the form is a legal declaration, the falsification of which could result in jail terms.

**For more information,  
call Elections Canada  
toll-free 1-800-463-6868**

### The federal vote:

the homeless cannot register to vote federally until the election has

been formally called. at that time, the "returning officer" for each riding will seek an office within his/her riding, and the person can register at the returning office.

the person will need an ID card carrying

their name and signature - photo not required. the address given can be a shelter.

alternatively, s/he can simply show up at the polls on election day with id carrying their name and signature - no address is required.

finally, if the person has no id card, s/he can arrive at the polls with a registered voter who can legally vouch for that person being who they say they are, and belonging to the riding they say they do.

*Info thanks to Orion Carrier, UVic Greens*

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Photo: Elaine Briere

# COMMUNITY ART VS. PUBLIC ART

By Shylene Schiackl  
<http://www.mosaicthecity.com/>

What is the difference between community art and public art? Public art is generally designed and built by one artist. Community art gives people in an area the opportunity to create art together.

Both types of art are usually put on display for everyone to enjoy. One may ask - "there a way to connect these two forms of art so everyone can win?" There is, and it's called Mosaic the City.

## MOSAIC THE CITY

Mosaic the City is a community unity initiative started in Victoria in the summer of 2003.

It is a spirit, an initiative, and an organization that fosters the creation of neighbourhood mosaic art projects. Each project brings people together to learn about each other while sharing in the creation of unique mosaic art pieces.

Each project is community inspired, community designed, and community built by the people who live, work, learn, or shop in a neighbourhood.

## SHYLENE'S EXPERIENCE

This all started when I attended the 2002 BC Festival of the Arts in Surrey BC. I learned about the art of being a professional artist, about all that was required to succeed.

One of the mentors was Richard Teltrault - a community artist starting a large scale community mosaic project in the DTES - Community Walls/Community Voices. I asked to be included in the project and, for the next eight months, traveled to the mainland to learn all I could from the imaginative leaders.

This project allowed the community to express creatively about themselves - where they came from, what their origin meant to them.

At the end of the project more then thirty mosaic

medallions were community designed and created, to be permanently mounted on a three-block retaining wall on Commercial Drive.

What an amazing project! It was so wonderful to see all these different people come together in one place to share, learn and create. I knew I had to bring this ideal situation to Victoria.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Community Art projects connect people. They take time to plan and this creates the opportunity for people to get to know each other. People get to share life experiences, skills and knowledge. They come out to be creative, and they create relationships. In the end there is a lovely piece of mosaic art permanently mounted to keep a community indefinitely connected.

Mosaic the Market 2003 had over 300 people from around the globe come together in a relaxed, creative public space to design and create unique recycled mosaics. The theme of the project was 'Use what you have' and inspired the participants to be thoughtful to our earth by using broken materials.



Mosaic the City is currently involved with Central Middle School's Community Unity project. All such projects will be linked together through maps

connecting all the mosaics, all the neighbourhoods and all the communities that create Community Unity.

Maps give neighbours a reason to walk through one another's neighbourhoods. When each is connected to the next, you are also connected -indefinitely - to all future and past Community Unity projects.

Now this is public community art we can all agree is connected!

## Poet's Corner

### *Moving Harmoniously*

David Arthur Johnston

<http://www.angelfire.com/apes/hatrackman>

The last motion leads to the next. The single motion that is the entirety of motion continues... And forgiveness makes way for grace.

Thought is motion. Thought is the internal motion that births the external motion. Through practice we respond.

Like wind against an inextinguishable candle-flame, we take the brunt and respond with honour. Beware an ego that justifies a lie. Beware an ego that cannot forgive, for to not be able to forgive is the height of laziness- the unwillingness to empathize with the attacker- who can only attack because that is where it's experience has brought it. So, through forgiveness and a total giving of self we introduce new consideration, that love is something to die for, not kill for.

Ego is a construct of experience. May the experience of humility exist, for only through that do we evolve.

Through shining with confidence and knowing patience true inspiration comes, not through the frustration of unfulfilled preconception or the allowance of resentment.

At any time there can only be two spirits that approach and communicate- a spirit of humility, which is a want of truth, or a spirit of pride, which is a telling of a lie. When you know how to respond to both you find there is nothing that cannot be handled.

Dealing with humility is easy because it's love. Dealing with pride requires an owning of calmness unto death, fearless- for even the most proud are susceptible to inspiration.

*The following was anonymously submitted:*

May I live life to its fullest and not in the shadows of existence ...

By not dwelling on yesterday or residing in tomorrow, away from all that is.

My wish to you is that your happiness be always in your heart whatever life brings your way.



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Crows  
Kai Primeau

They're black, blackest black,  
they like to pick up garbage.  
They're black, blackest black,  
and many say they're savage.

They're black, blackest black,  
and they laugh at our so-called "order".  
They laugh and laugh and laugh,  
because they have no border.

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